

Balancing Motivation and Burnout in The Learning of Foreign Languages

Nurul Amirah Khairul Amali¹, Irma Wahyuny Ibrahim², Saidah Ismail³, Haslinda Md Isa⁴, Nazurah Izzati Yazid⁵, Faatihah Zaharah Mohamed Razif⁶

^{1,2,3,4}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Selangor, ⁵Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia, ⁶School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts, University of Wollongong, Malaysia

Email: amirahamali@uitm.edu.my, wahyuny@uitm.edu.my, saidah721@uitm.edu.my, haslinda281@uitm.edu.my, nazurahyazid@um.edu.my, faatihah.mr@uow.edu.my

Corresponding Author Email: amirahamali@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract

Being motivated and experiencing burnout during study is a common occurrence, and there appears to be a number of dimensions in which they are related. Despite having the most sophisticated educational frameworks, students always rely on their own motivation to meet their learning goals and avoid burnout at the same time. However, motivation is the driving force behind learning and can act as a mediator in reducing burnout in students. Hence, this study investigates the balancing motivation and burnout in the learning of foreign languages. A quantitative method is used to explore the relation of motivation and burnout in the learning of foreign languages. The data was collected using a five-point Likert scale survey adapted from (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Campos, et al., 2011). There are four sections in the survey. Section A are items on the demographic profile, Section B are 24 items on motivational factors and Section C are the 16 items on burnout factors. 125 undergraduate students studying French at a public university in Malaysia were selected using purposive sampling to answer the survey. The study found that task beliefs and extrinsic motivation drive learners more than intrinsic motivation. Though students are motivated, they are also found to be burned out. This demonstrates the connection between motivation and burnout. The data evaluated using SPSS further supports this, demonstrating a moderate positive correlation between motivation and burnout. The results indicated a significant pedagogical outcome and issued invaluable aspects and future research exploring the correlation between motivation and burnout in the learning of foreign languages is recommended.

Keywords: Motivation, Burnout, Foreign Language

Introduction*Background of Study*

In Malaysia, most of the public universities offer foreign language courses as one of their optional courses or required electives. This is one of the efforts from the Government to promote foreign languages, which have advantages for the social, political, and economic spheres. However, it is not easy to learn a language; in order to succeed, a learner needs to be motivated. Learners are driven by motivation, which fuels their drive and desire to succeed in their language acquisition. That is why motivation is well known for helping people begin learning and also acting as a catalyst to keep going through the long and difficult process of learning a language. That being said, if learners experience burnout in the process, it gets harder for them to meet their learning objectives.

According to a study by Shazali et al (2023), there is an odd relationship between burnout and students' motivation. Extrinsic motivation is discovered to be greater for the respondents compared to intrinsic motivation. Rather than achieving their own objectives for self-satisfaction, they appear more focused on their success in the eyes of their friends and relatives. Moreover, the respondents' reason for burnout is also perceived in a moderate way. This is further supported by a study by Yusof et al (2023), which found a moderate to moderately strong positive relationship between the motivational component and burnout components like fatigue, disengagement, e-learning difficulties, and other issues. These results provide evidence to the theories suggesting a relationship between motivation and burnout.

Statement of Problem

Despite having numerous studies done on foreign languages, the correlation between motivation and burnout is an understudied area in foreign language acquisition among students especially in Malaysia. Very few research has been conducted in the recent years on finding the relationship of motivation and burnout in foreign language learning. One study which involved 1718 high school students in China, was carried out to investigate foreign language learning burnout among the students. (Chengchen, et al., 2021). The 15-item Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) was used in this quantitative study and was reworded to be used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning setting. The adapted version of the survey, the 10-item Maslach Burnout Inventory-EFL Student Survey was used to measure validity and reliability. For validity, item is categorised as criterion validity, convergent validity, and construct validity whereas for reliability, respondents were asked on item analysis and internal consistency. The result claimed that foreign language learning burnout has a three-dimensional construct which consists of Reduced Efficacy, cynicism, and exhaustion. The findings support Foreign Language education in China where the students' achievements in exams relate to the acceptance to good high school and universities, which are needed for their future careers. Students had FL learning in weekdays, weekends and evening classes which explain the absence of enjoyment in FL learning and produce a stressful environment that is linked to learning burnout.

Another recent study by Karimi & Fallah (2021) investigated the association of academic burnout, shame emotion, perceived teacher affective support and intrinsic motivation in the group of Iranian Foreign Language students. The study involved 306 Iranian students, who learned English as a foreign language and they were asked to answer the four sets of

questionnaires, which focussed on academic burnout, teacher affective support, shame emotion, and intrinsic motivation. The researchers used SPSS to tabulate the data and statistics, also analysed the result with Confirmatory Factor Analysis for validation assurance. The result showed that teacher affective support, shame emotion and intrinsic motivation linked automatically with academic burnout. The study concluded that teachers of foreign language play a vital role in determining students' achievement in foreign language learning.

Several studies including these two stated studies indicated that there is a need to find a relationship between motivation and burnout in foreign language learning. Chengchen, et al (2021) suggested in their study that it would be interesting if there would be continuation studies in exploring the correlation between foreign language learning burnout and other FL acquisition variables such as motivation, efficacy, engagement etc. These kinds of studies might give answers to foreign language students on preventing foreign language learning burnout. Meanwhile Karimi & Fallah (2021) claimed in their studies that there is a need to investigate on how to prevent academic burnout, factors that they have studied, include, shame emotion, perceived teacher affective support and intrinsic motivation which caused academic burnout should be taken seriously by foreign language teachers. The language education might cripple if researchers fail to investigate further and find the solutions for betterment. Additionally, other recent studies mainly focussed on foreign language teachers' burnout Sato et al (2022); Rostami et al (2015); Song (2022); Caruso (2019) and fail to provide studies on the correlation of motivation and burnout among foreign language students. These situations present the research gap in foreign language learning especially in the area of motivation and burnout, hence justify the need for this research.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies based on their motivation and feeling of burnout. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions

- How do learners perceive their motivation in learning?
- How do learners perceive their burnout in learning?
- How do the mean scores of motivational constructs and causes of burnout differ?
- What is the relationship between all motivational components and burnout?

Literature Review

Demotivation and Motivation for Language

Students are interested in acquiring foreign language due to motivation. They believe that the ability to communicate in foreign language will help them to have better prospects in the future especially when their job scope requires them to communicate without ease in the targeted foreign language. The most famous definition of motivation was proposed by Canadian Psychologists R.C Gardner and W. E Lambert, they proposed that motivation has two different orientations, instrumental orientation, and integrative orientation (Gardner Lambert, 1959 cited in Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020). Students that have instrumental orientation will learn the language for reaching their goals, for example, getting good grades or getting hired because of having foreign language skills, whereas students that possess integrative orientation, learn the targeted foreign language because they want to be a part of the community and immerse themselves in the community that speak the targeted foreign language. Contrarily, demotivation is the opposite of motivation, and it causes negative

outcomes in foreign language learning acquisition and performances. If motivation is the effort and willingness to learn the targeted foreign language, consequently, it can be stated that demotivated students are those who lack effort and are reluctant in continuing the process of foreign language learning.

Causes and Consequences of Burnout among learners

In the literature, the notion of burnout was first introduced in studies focussing on the workforce. The burnout profiles of teachers later were introduced in the language learning setting. The shift to student-oriented approaches in the context of foreign languages has been addressed when academic burnout is largely underexplored as pointed out by numerous studies. Hashim et al (2023) reported that several causes contribute to student burnout. The majority pointed out that academic pressure confronted by students plays a huge part in this situation. Excessive workload, high expectations, and intense competition lead to stress. Additionally, poor time management skills and the incapability to balance academic demands along with individual obligations can augment a student's stress level. External aspects namely financial concerns, community pressures, and the absence of support systems can aggravate fatigue among students. Burnout induced by strain can lead to a decline in academic achievement and can affect the overall well-being of students. Subsequently, exploring and understanding the causation and the consequences of burnout can assist students in managing academic stress effectively and can promote a positive learning environment.

Past Studies on Motivation in Language Learning

Since Gardner & Lambert (Gardner & Lambert, 1959 cited in Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020) proposed motivation theory in 1959, numerous studies on motivation have been conducted to investigate the students' motivation in foreign language learning in the 80's, 90's, 2000s and 2010s Gardner (1988); Dornyei (1994); Gardner & Tremblay (1994); Masgoret & Gardner (2003); Samaie, et al (2006); Gardner (2014), however, studies are dwindling recently, only less than a handful of studies are available in the past 5 years. One most recent study conducted by Yu, et al (2022) aspired to explore the correlation between language learning motivation and academic burnout in learning English as a foreign language. The respondents for this study were 841 university students who studied English as a Foreign language in two universities in China. The study also investigated whether maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (ERS) which include avoiding, suppression, and venting can be used to weaken the relationship between motivation and burnout. The findings suggested that the respondents experienced high levels of burnout. Another analysis which is called bootstrapped moderation analysis showed high levels of moderation, which were avoiding and venting. It was proposed that future researchers are urged to investigate correlations between motivation and burnout in different areas or using different samples.

Another study on motivation, is finding the relationship between participants in extracurricular activities and motivation in foreign language learning which has been conducted by (Albayrak and SENER, 2021). There were 340 participants from a private university in Ankara, Turkey. This quantitative research used Motivation Scale as the instrument and also used Socio-Educational Motivation Theory as the basis to develop the questionnaire. The findings revealed that participation in extracurricular activities contributed to an effective effect on the students' attitude in learning targeted foreign languages. It is

believed that the extracurricular activities give students more confidence and consequently boost their motivation level in foreign language learning. The researchers suggested that foreign language teachers or educators need to be trained to increase the students' motivation level by adapting extracurricular activities in the syllabus or curriculum.

Past Studies on Learning Burnout

Despite the bulk of research exploring learning burnout, the notion seems to remain uncharted territory among foreign languages. In the quantitative study by Liu (2023), two fundamental factors were investigated about student burnout. The growth mindset and the perceived school climate factors in the setting of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning among Chinese students were explored in depth. A sample of 412 respondents who have had 8 to 13 years of studying English from various institutions in China was surveyed. The instrument survey employed was adapted from the "Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey". It is reported that school climate is a prime element in promoting an optimistic learning setting and has more bearing on student burnout compared to a growth mindset. Still, a growth mindset plays a protective role which permits students to overcome challenges and hindrances. Interestingly, Liu (2023) discovered that school climate had a slight effect on growth mindset. These findings have further implications for teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in the educational system. To achieve an ideal scenario, this study recommends comprehensive plans and applied initiatives to minimise burnout and enhance academic achievement.

Similarly, another study by Li et al (2021) investigated foreign language learning burnout concerning the Foreign Language educational context in China. To answer the research questions, this study explored the validity and reliability of the adapted "Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey" for FL-specific student burnout. Then, the researchers measured the conceptualization of FL learning burnout which is a three-dimensional construct surrounding Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Reduced Efficacy in specific relation to Chinese secondary students later, Liu et al (2021) identified the overall and dimensional profiles of their foreign language burnout. A convenience sample of 1718 second-year English students from three senior high schools at different academic levels in China was surveyed and to gauge burnout, the modified "Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey" is employed. The findings confirmed that this study presented an FL-specific measurement for student burnout and could be applied in future research in a similar EFL learning setting. The test results also showed that foreign language burnout is a three-dimensional construct (Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Reduced Efficacy) and the profiles of the participants were established. The empirical results demonstrated that students experienced low levels of burnout, but the students' burnout grew to a certain extent which supports the argument that burnout is correlated with contextual elements. Future research suggested by Liu et al (2021) is to investigate the relationship between subscales of burnout and other FL-learning-related variables such as motivation and others.

Conceptual Framework

Successful language learning requires learners to maintain their motivation. Learner's confidence comes from being comfortable with the knowledge they received. This confidence then gives a sense of satisfaction to the learners (Rahmat, et.al., 2021). However, sometimes lack of motivation on the part of the learners can lead to burnout among learners. The

conceptual framework is presented in figure 1 below. This study is rooted from motivational constructs by Pintrich & DeGroot (1990) such as value, expectancy and affective components. Next this study also explores the causes of burnout by Campos, et. al (2011) such as exhaustion and disengagement.

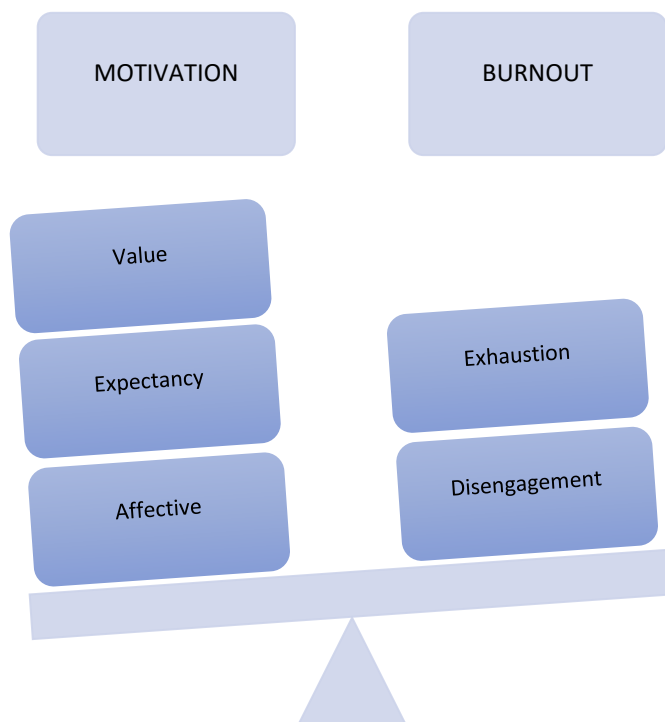


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-
Balancing motivation and burnout in the learning of foreign languages

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore balancing motivation and burnout in the learning of foreign languages. A purposive sample of 125 undergraduates UiTM students studying French responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Pintrich & DeGroot (1990); Campos, et. al (2011) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 24 items on Motivation factors . Section C has 16 items on Burnout factors.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECT	MAIN CONSTRUCT	COMPONENT	VARIABLE		No Of Items	Total Items
B	MOTIVATION Pintrich & De Groot (1990).	VALUE	(i)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	24
			(ii)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3	
			(iii)	Task Value Beliefs	5	
		EXPECTANCY	(i)	Students' Perception of Self- Efficacy	5	
			(ii)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2	
		AFFECTIVE				
C	BURNOUT (Campos, et.al (2011))	EXHAUSTION		8	16	
		DISENGAGEMENT		8		
TOTAL NO OF ITEMS						40

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.920	40

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .920, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1-Gender

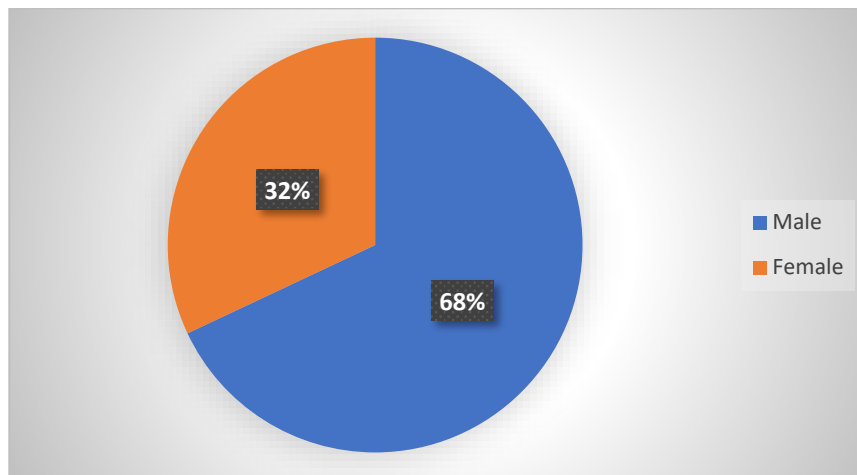


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows 32% of females and 68% males took part in the survey.

Q2-Course

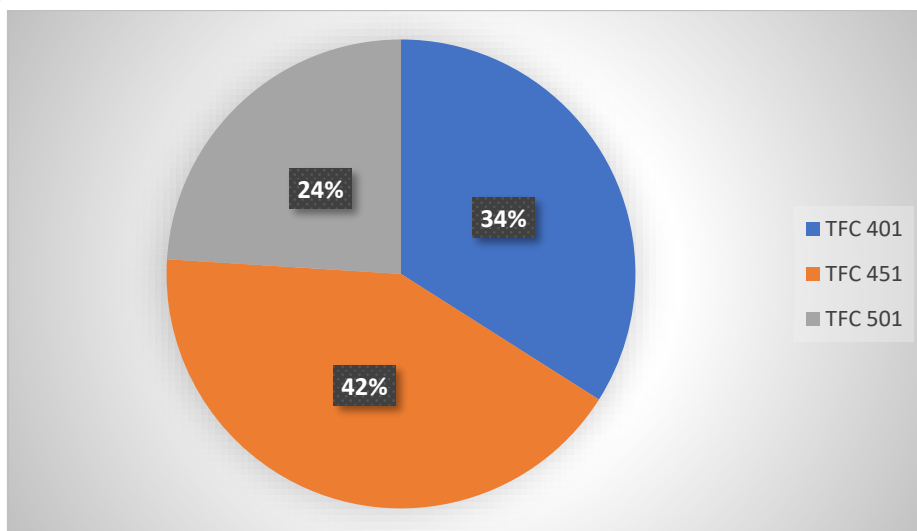


Figure 3- Percentage for Course

Based on Figure 3, 34% participants are from TFC 401, 42% are from TFC 451 and the remaining 24% are from TFC 501.

Q3 -Discipline

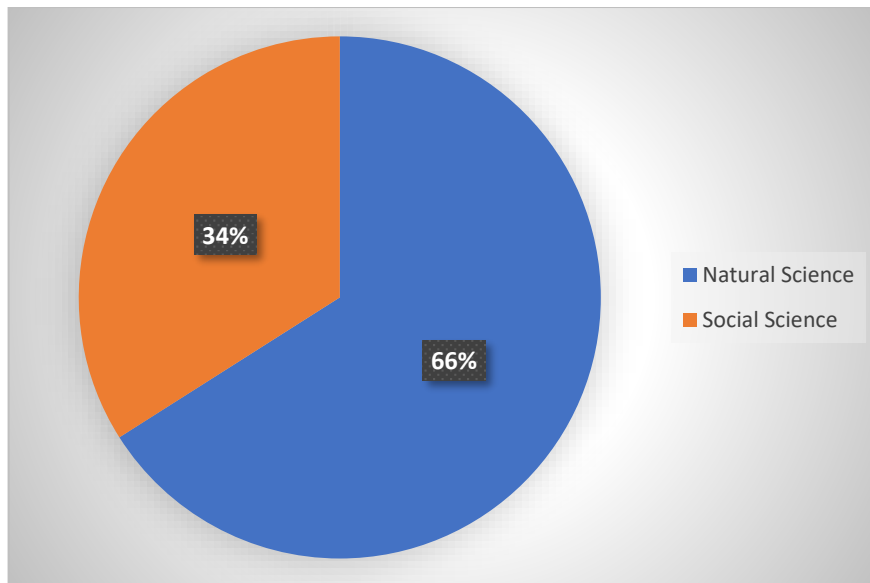


Figure 4- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 4 shows the distribution by disciplines. 66% shows that respondents are from Natural Science and 34% are from Social Science.

Findings for Motivation

This section presents data to answer research question 1 - How do learners perceive their motivation in learning?

Motivational Scale (24 Items)

Value Component (12 Items)

Value is measured by (i) intrinsic goal orientation, (ii) extrinsic goal orientation, and (iii) task value beliefs

(i) Intrinsic Goal Orientation (4 items)

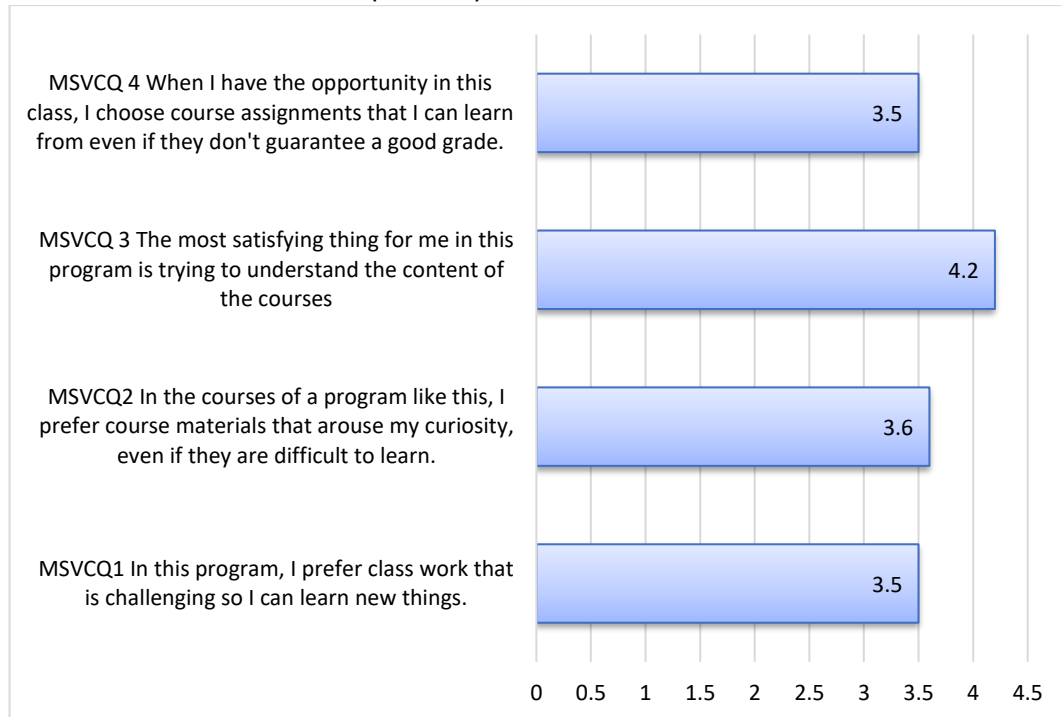


Figure 5- Mean for intrinsic goal orientation

Based on Figure 5, the highest mean for intrinsic goal orientation is 4.2 whereby the most satisfying thing for students in this program is trying to understand the content of the courses. Meanwhile, the other means in this figure are 3.6 and 3.5.

(ii) Extrinsic Goal Orientation (3 items)

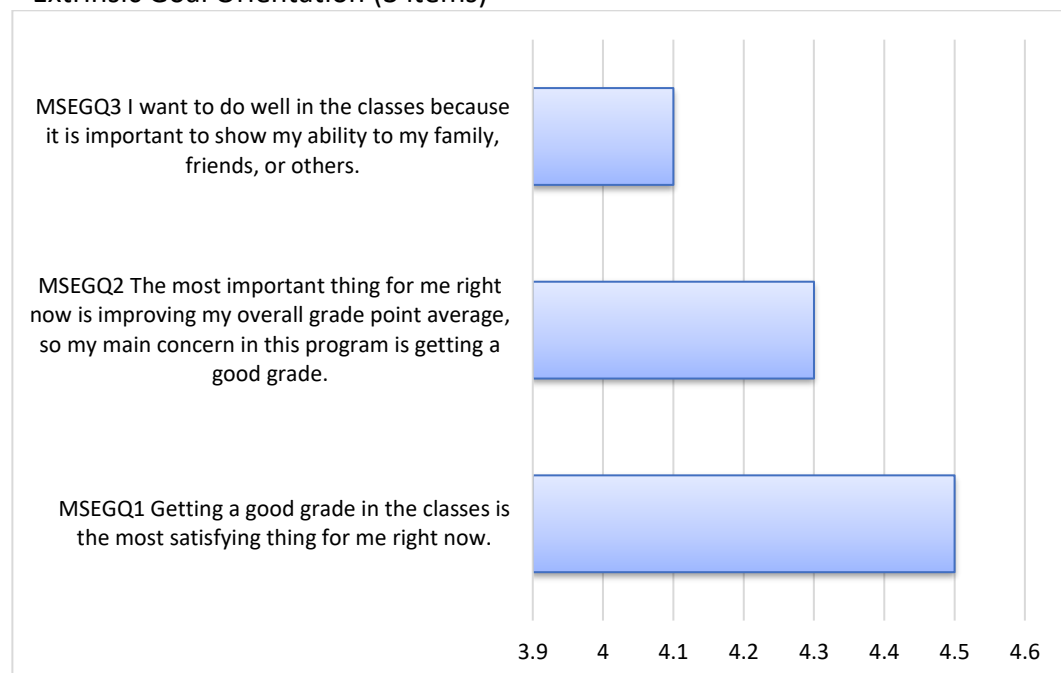


Figure 6- Mean for Extrinsic goal orientation

Figure 6 shows that the lowest mean for extrinsic goal orientation is 4.1 in which students want to do well in the classes because it is important to show their ability to their family,

friends or others. Highest means goes to getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing for the student right now at a mean of 4.5

(iii) Task Value Beliefs (5 items)

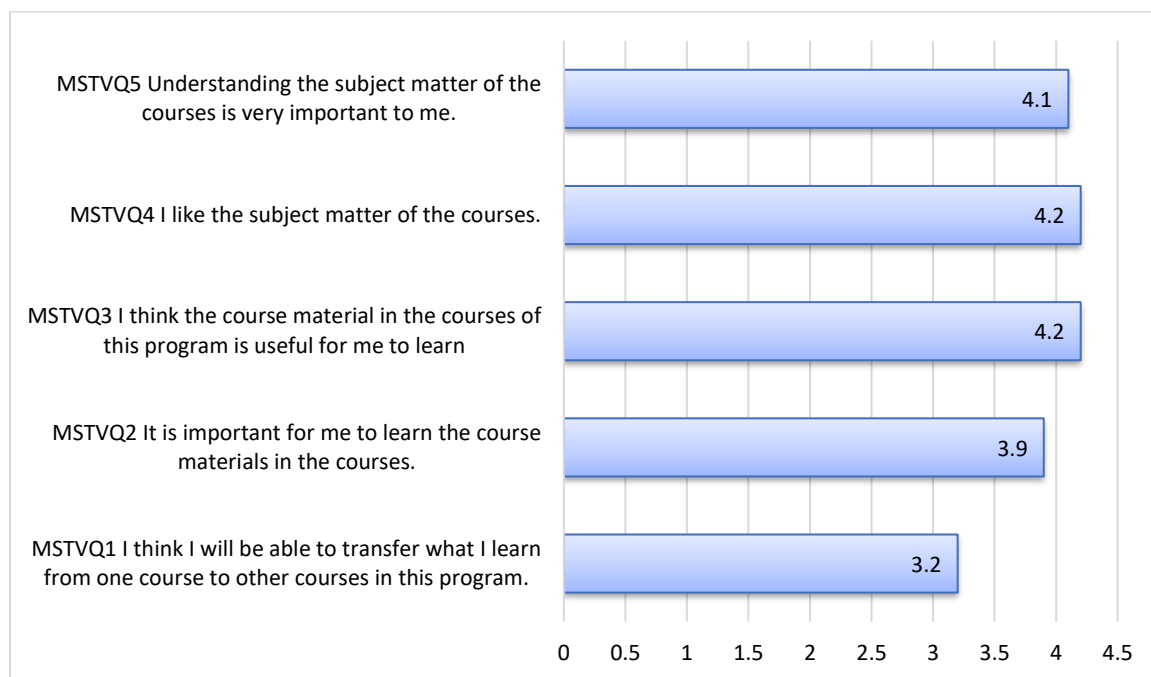


Figure 7- Mean for Task Value Beliefs

Figure 7 shows the Task Value Beliefs. The lowest is item 5 where it indicates that the respondents’ neither agree nor disagree that they think they will be able to transfer what they learn from one course to other courses in this program (M = 3.2). Meanwhile, item 3 and 4 share the highest mean score (M = 4.2) This shows that the respondents agree that they think the course material in the courses of this program is useful for them to learn and they like the subject matter of the courses.

B. EXPECTANCY COMPONENT (7 items)

Expectancy is measured by (i) students’ perception of self-efficacy and (ii) control beliefs for learning.

(i) Students' Perception of Self-Efficacy (5 items)

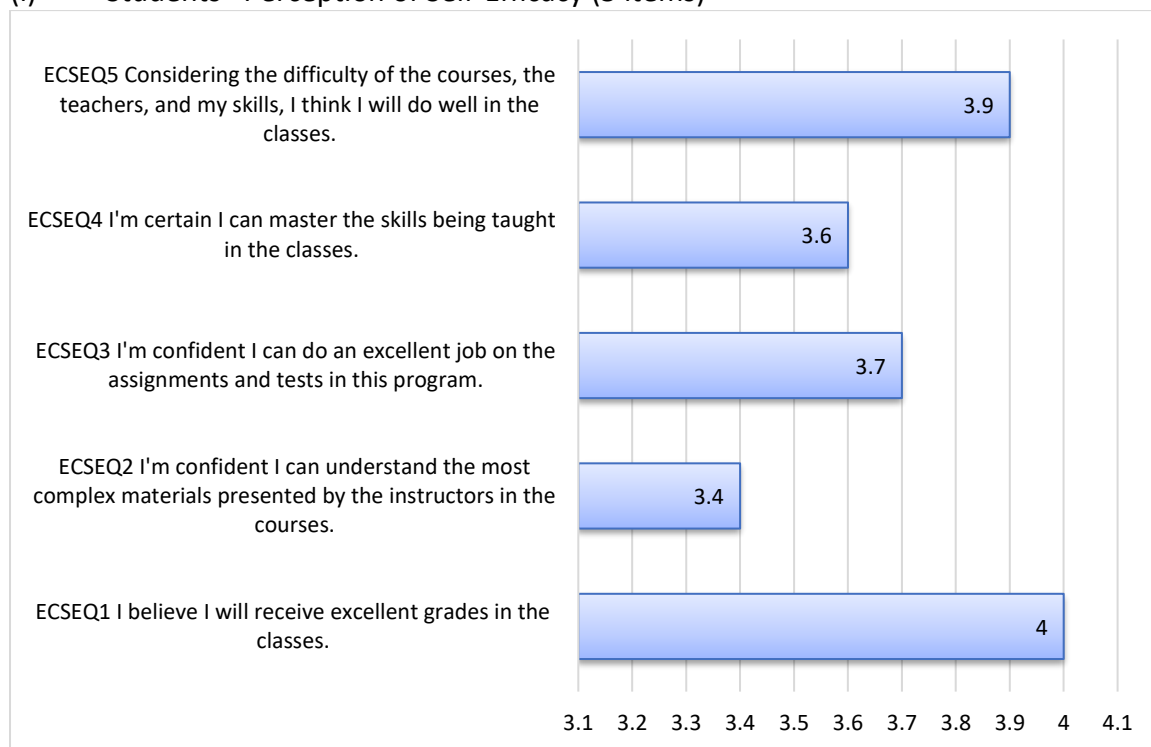


Figure 8- Mean for Students' perception of Self-Efficacy

Figure 8 presents the frequency of students' perception of self-efficacy in terms of mean score. The highest mean score was 4.0 where the students believed they will receive excellent grades in the classes. The second highest mean score with 3.9 indicated those who were considering the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and their own skills, thought that they will do well in the classes. Additionally, the item that received 3.7 mean score, proposed that the students were confident that he/she can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this program. The second lowest mean score with 3.6 mean score denoted that the students were certain that she/he can master the skills being taught in the classes. Finally, the lowest mean score was 3.4 showed that students were confident that they can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses.

(ii) Control Beliefs for Learning (2 items)

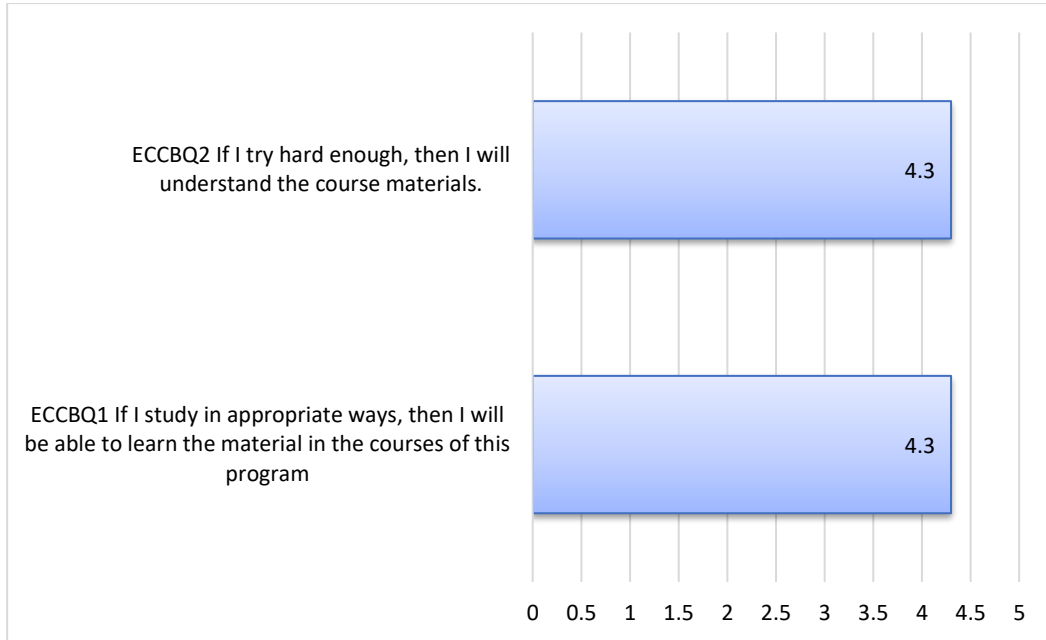


Figure 9- Mean for Control Beliefs for learning

Figure 9 displays the mean score for Control Beliefs for learning. Both items share the same mean score, 4.3. The first item was the students believed if they study in appropriate ways, then they will be able to learn the materials in the courses of this program. The second item shows that students believe that if they try hard enough, then they will understand the course materials.

C. Affective Component (5 items)

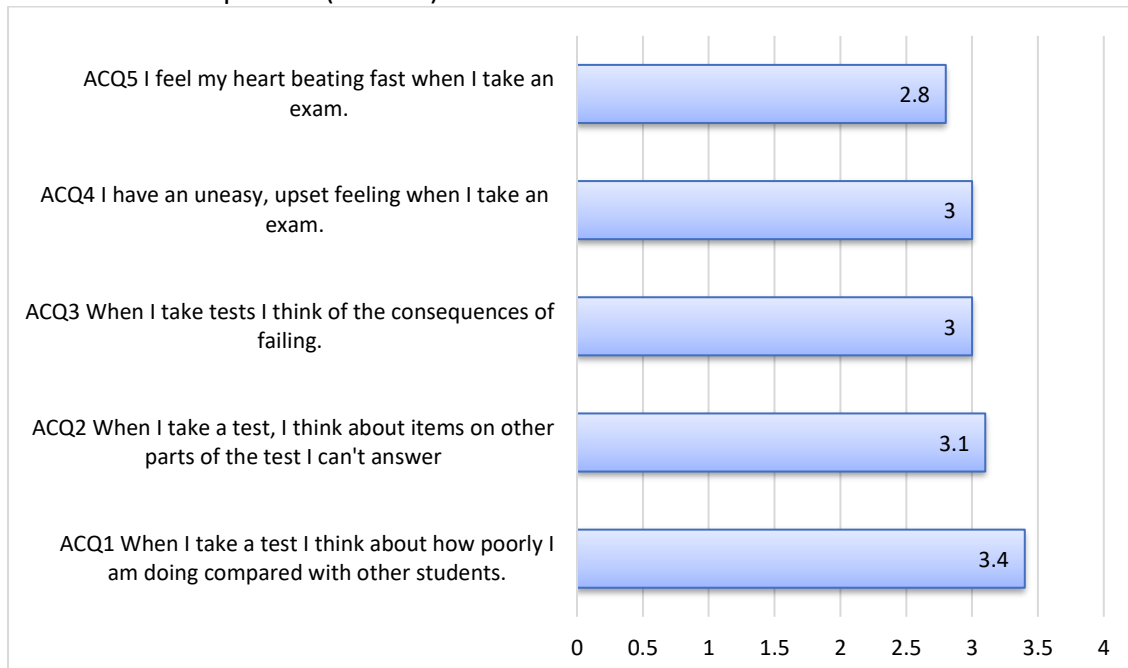


Figure 10- Mean for Affective Components

Figure 10 displays the mean score for affective components that measure the students' performance in a test or exam. The lowest mean score was 2.8, indicated that the students were experiencing nervousness when taking an exam. Next, two statements eventually shared the same mean score, 3. The items were, when the students take tests, he/she thinks about the consequences of failing and he/she also has uneasy feeling when taking an exam. The third mean score, 3.1, indicated that when students take a test, he/she will think about items on other parts of the test he/she can't answer. The highest mean score, 3.4, suggested that when the student takes a test she/he thinks about how poorly he/she does, compared with other students.

Findings for Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 2 - How do learners perceive their burnout in learning?

Burnout Scale (12 items)

Exhaustion (8 items)

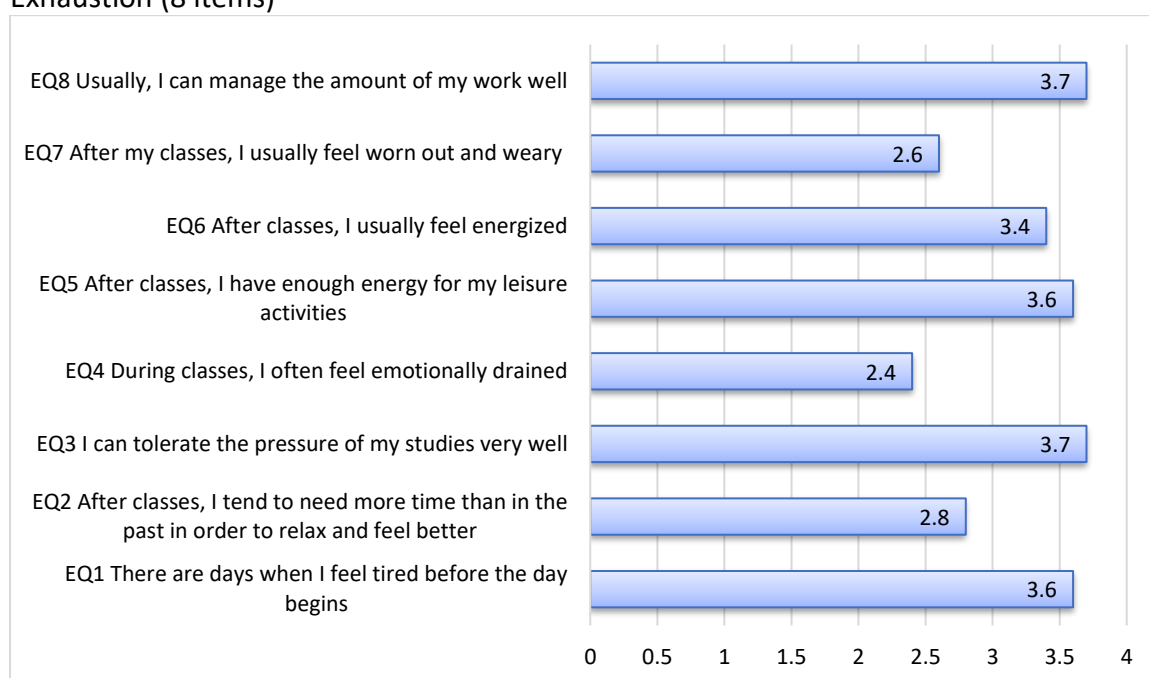


Figure 11- Mean for Exhaustion

Figure 11 provides a list of the eight subscales that influence students' mean for burnout-exhaustion, all of which have an impact on students' drive to learn. The analysis recorded that 'the students can manage the amount of work well' and 'can tolerate the pressure' with a similar mean score (M:3.7) and these statements have the highest mean scores among the items. The second highest mean readings are items EQ1 and EQ5, as this may indicate that before the day begins, they already feel exhausted and they have enough energy for leisure activities after class. Followed by 'after class, they feel energized' (EQ6: 3.4) and 'after classes, they tend to need more time than in the past to relax and feel better'(EQ2:2.8). Next, 'they usually feel worn out and weary after classes' with a mean score of 2.6. The statement that 'they often feel emotionally drained' has a mean of M=2.4, which is the lowest possible value (EQ7).

B. Disengagement (8 items)

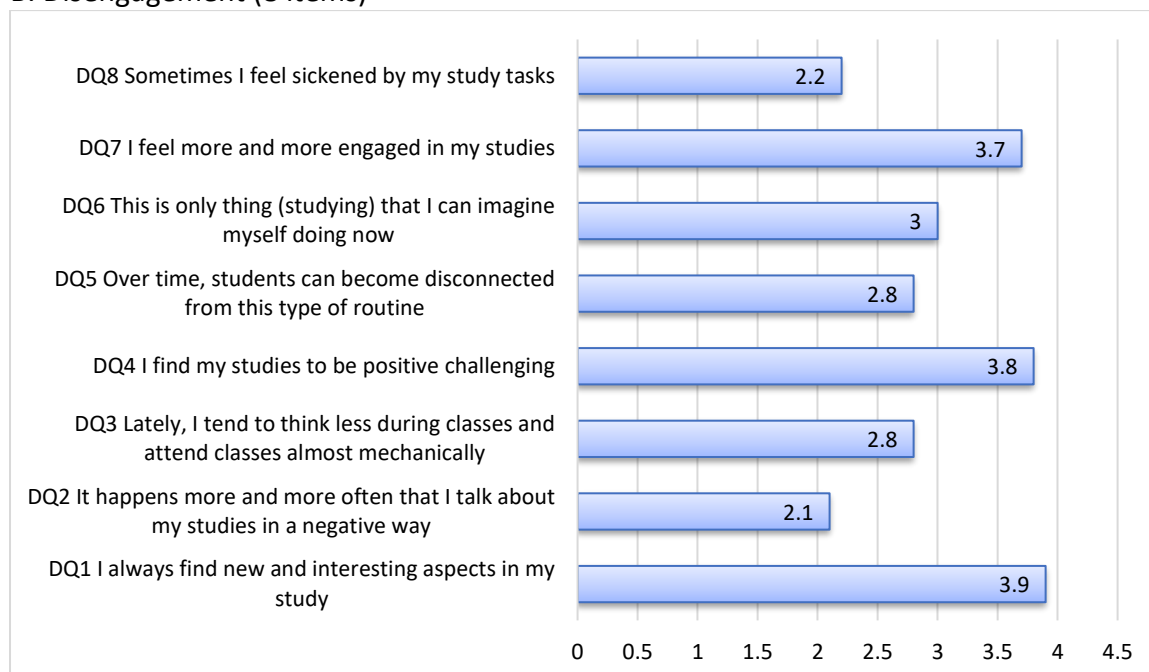


Figure 12- Mean for Disengagement

Figure 12 illustrates the mean score for disengagement. Among all eight items, the analysis reported the highest mean score of 3.9 for 'always find new and interesting aspects in the study'. DQ4 recorded the second highest mean (M=3.8), which indicates that the students find the studies to be positively challenging. It is followed by DQ7 (M=3.7) whereby the students feel more and more engaged in the studies. Next, item DQ6 (studying is the only thing that they can imagine doing now) recorded a mean score of 3.0. The analysis also stated that 'the students tend to think less during classes and attend classes mechanically' and 'over time, they can become disconnected from this type of routine) with a similar mean score (M=2.8). As for the lowest mean value, the item that the students talked about the studies negatively and frequently recorded the lowest (M=2.1), meanwhile, DQ8 (they feel sickened by the study tasks) demonstrated the second lowest value at 2.2.

Findings for Comparison of Mean Scores

This section presents data to answer research question 3 - How do the mean scores of motivational constructs and causes of burnout differ?

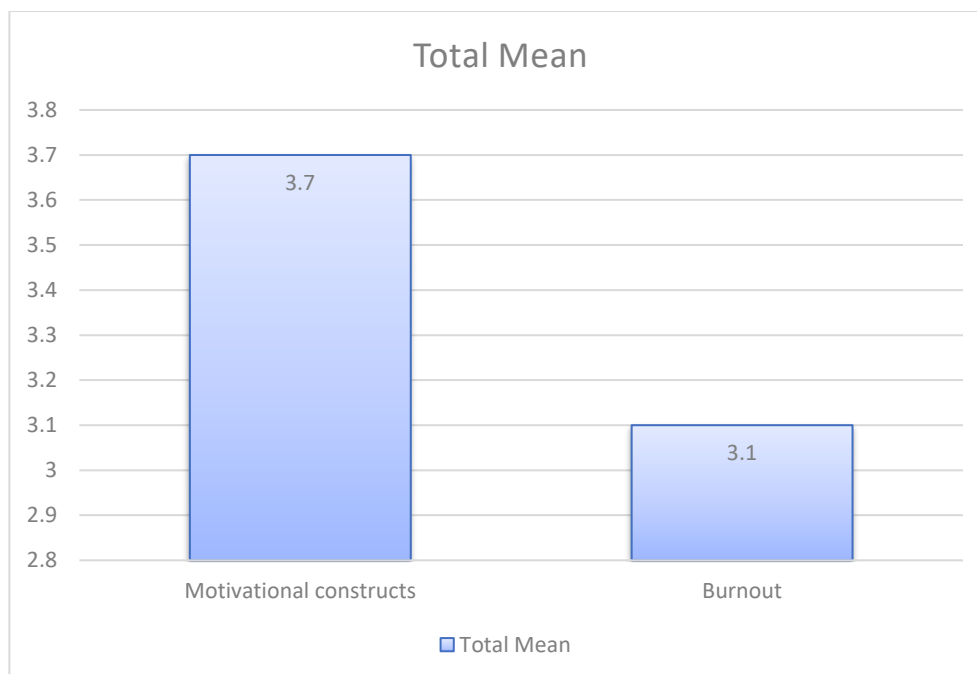


Figure 13- Comparison of Total Mean for Mean for Motivational Constructs and Burnout

Figure 13 displays the total mean for the motivational constructs and the total mean of causes of burnout. The total mean score for motivational constructs is 3.7 which indicates that the respondents agree with the motivational constructs. The total mean score for burnout is 3.1 which indicates that the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the causes of burnout.

Findings for Relationship between

This section presents data to answer research question 4 - What is the relationship between all motivational components and burnout?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3 below.

Correlations

		MOTIVATION CONSTRUCT S	BURNOUT
MOTIVATIONCONSTRUC TS	Pearson Correlation	1	.449**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	125	125
BURNOUT	Pearson Correlation	.449**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	125

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between motivational constructs and burnout. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between motivational constructs and burnout. (r=.449**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015),

coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between motivational constructs and burnout.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study's main goal was to look into how motivation and burnout balance out when learning foreign languages. The results highlight a number of issues about how foreign languages learners could achieve a balance between motivation and burnout.

Research Question 1 is How do learners perceive their motivation in learning? Based on the findings, it is discovered that among respondents, extrinsic motivation and task value beliefs are more significant than intrinsic motivation. Regarding the expectancy component, respondents lean more towards their perceptions of control over their learning than towards their self-efficacy. Additionally, the pupils' affective component is moderately significant. These findings are aligned with the findings of Shazali et al. (2023). Given that extrinsic motivation has a higher mean score than intrinsic motivation, their findings demonstrated the superiority of extrinsic motivation over intrinsic motivation. Additionally, the findings showed that the students' control belief score was high and their self-efficacy level was moderate.

Research Question 2 is How do learners perceive their burnout in learning? The findings revealed that there is a moderate perception of the burnout factors. The exhaustion component is more significant than the disengagement component, despite the fact that the difference is negligible. Similar findings are found in a study by Kaharudin et al. (2023) where their results also showed that students' opinions and feelings of exhaustion and disengagement are moderate. Their research showed that a variety of factors, like a lack of enthusiasm in the subject matter, uninspired teaching strategies, or an overburdensome curriculum, might cause students to lose interest in their studies. Meanwhile, a lack of balance between academics and other facets of life, excessive workloads, protracted study sessions, and academic pressure can all contribute to student tiredness.

Research Question 3 is How do the mean scores of motivational constructs and causes of burnout differ? The motivational components have a total mean score of 3.7, meaning that the respondents generally agree with the items. As for the burnout components, the respondents' overall mean score is 3.1, meaning they moderately agree with the items. This contributed to the finding of the last Research Question which is What is the relationship between all motivational components and burnout? From the findings, it is shown that there is a moderate positive relationship between motivational components and burnout components. In contrast, the results contradict the findings of the Nazri et al. (2023) study, which found that the correlation between affective, which is one of motivation components, and burnout, had only a weak positive relationship. Conclusively, our study has provided insightful information. The evidence of a positive correlation between motivation and burnout is proof for learners, educators and stakeholders to find the best way to balance out both motivation and burnout components as they may influence the outcomes of the foreign language learning.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, future studies are encouraged to examine variables that support a healthy balance between motivation and burnout when learning foreign languages. Future studies may also focus on how to promote intrinsic motivation among language learners, as this enables them to achieve their own satisfaction while discovering that learning foreign languages is interesting or enjoyable. Additionally, future research needs to be done on the factors that minimize burnout among learners in order to guarantee a seamless learning experience both limiting burnout and ensuring that learners are always motivated, which ensures a success in acquiring their target language.

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